
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WETLANDS PROTECTION IN ROCKPORT, MA



What are Wetlands?

‘Wetland resource areas’ include freshwater wetlands like the commonly known **cattail marsh**, open water **ponds** (including **quarries** and ‘**motions**’), **rivers** that flow throughout the year, 200-foot **riverfront areas** which border rivers on both sides, **intermittent streams** that dry up during part of the year, low-lying **flood plains**, and **vernal (springtime) pools**, as well as coastal wetlands like the **ocean**, coastal **beaches (including barrier beaches)**, coastal **dunes**, and **land subject to coastal storm flowage**, coastal **banks**, **rocky intertidal shores**, **salt marshes**,” **fish runs**,” and **land subject to tidal action**.



Why are Wetlands Important?

Wetland resource areas help maintain the aesthetic beauty of our town as well as provide critical habitat to wildlife. More importantly, they provide priceless yet ‘free’ services, including:

- Drinking water purification
- Ground water recharge
- Pollution prevention
- Flood control
- Storm damage prevention
- Beach/dune replenishment

All Rockport residents benefit from these services because of our reliance on natural settings for property values, wells for drinking water, septic systems for waste disposal, and safety from the coastal storms.



ROCKPORT CONSERVATION

*The Commission wants to see Rockport landowners proceed with their projects while simultaneously protecting the valuable resources that benefit
EVERYONE*

Before Starting a Project, Contact the Commission

A large percentage of Rockport homeowners have wetland resource areas on or near their property. If you plan to do any work in a wetland resource area within 100 feet of a wetland or within 200 feet of a river, such as:

- Tree removal or other vegetation clearing
- Grading or excavation
- New landscaping
- Construction, additions, septic system repair, etc.

or any other activity that might alter wetlands or their resource areas, you must contact the Commission. **Do not assume your contractor will automatically obtain all necessary permits.** If you do need approval, professional staff is ready to answer your questions and help guide you through the application process.

The complexity of the approval process is commensurate with the type and scale of the activity proposed. Minor projects such as removing a few trees may be handled by a simple approval letter while a large construction project may require a detailed application and evaluation during one or more public hearings.

Wetland ‘Do’s and Don’ts’

Many activities near wetland resource areas are allowed and do not require Commission approval, including:

- Mowing an existing lawn
- Working in an existing garden
- Pruning & maintaining existing landscape
- Planting native vegetation
- Hiking, horseback riding, & other passive recreation
- Cleaning culverts

Other activities are prohibited in wetland resource areas and are subject to fines (some are allowed, but only with a permit):

- Removing dead trees
- Dumping yard waste such as leaves, grass, etc, or other waste products, including pet wastes, into or near wetlands - including on the beach, on or over the coastal bank, or into the ocean
- Filling in quarries or ‘motions’
- Dumping dirt or other debris
- Draining or pumping water from wetland, pond or stream
- Dredging streams

Wetlands function best in a natural state.

Do not clear them or ‘clean them up.’

Wildlife often thrives in areas with brush piles, rotting logs, and other things some people might consider untidy.

***Thank You for Helping to Protect
Rockport’s Natural Resources***

Limiting Chemical Use & Water Conservation: A Few Words about Lawn Care

Do you know what comes out of your weed killer bottle or the lawn care spray truck? Chemicals - many of which can be harmful to humans, pets, wildlife, plants and the ocean life. They do more than make your lawn green.

The Commission recommends that you avoid using chemicals anywhere on your property due to the potential hazards that they pose to your drinking water, your children, and your pets. If you live next to a pond or quarry, fertilizer can also cause excessive plant growth in the water, harming both the environment and aesthetics. Many natural lawn care alternatives are readily available – and they work. Call our office for details.

The Commission also recommends that you use water responsibly when maintaining your lawn or other landscaping. Excessive lawn watering contributes to severe low-flow conditions in streams and rivers in all but the wettest years. Call our office for ideas and resources that will help you reduce your water use while still maintaining a beautiful yard.



What is the Conservation Commission & What Does it Do?

The Rockport Conservation Commission is a five (5) member volunteer board of town residents. Commissioners are appointed by the Board of Selectmen and serve for three (3) year terms.

The Conservation Commission is charged with the protection of the values and functions of wetlands. It regulates all activities that may affect or alter a wetland resource area. The Commission derives its authority from the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (MGL Ch. 131, s.40) as well as the Rockport Wetlands Bylaw (Rockport Code of By-laws, Chapter 14). Training in these laws helps Commissioners become knowledgeable in their implementation.

The Town of Rockport employs a full-time Conservation Agent who is trained in procedures and requirements and in wetland issues and environmental law. The Agent is familiar with wetland resource areas, monitors permitted work in these areas, and advises the Conservation Commission on issues which come before it, including violations of the WPA and the By-Law. The Agent is also a resource to the public and can help you with your project.

Associate members are always welcome to be a part of the Commission. Join today!

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